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# The 1916 Easter Rising: A History Of Commemoration

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# THE 1916 EASTER RISING: A HISTORY OF COMMEMORATION



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SIT Ireland, Fall 2007  
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*To my not-so-secret agents, Fionnuala and Maebh*

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## INTRODUCTION

Before traveling to Ireland, I watched the film *Michael Collins*; aside from the *single* paragraph of text allocated to the 1916 Easter Rising in The Course of Irish History, the film shaped my understanding of the Irish fight for independence. As the semester progressed, this basic understanding evolved into a solid grasp of Irish history and politics. As a student of history with a specific interest in historiography, I aimed to structure my Independent Research Project (ISP) around Irish history so that I could delve deeper into my preferred field. Throughout the semester my intrigue piqued as I noticed how certain aspects of Ireland's long history have been remembered, romanticized, and commemorated quite differently than how basic history texts recount these seemingly significant events. With this thought in mind, I selected the Easter Rising of 1916 to study as an example of a historical event which has been greatly commemorated and revisited throughout the near century-long period since it was quelled. I thought the Rising was an appropriate event for my study because it was recent enough to still have the burning embers of popular memory of the actual event but far enough in the past that I would avoid the heavy and intricate politics of the more recent troubles; it was not long until I realized that very little of what has happened in twentieth century Ireland is "immune" to the troubles, the commemoration and historiography of the 1916 Easter Rising being no exception.

The seminal text I drew upon for this project was the collection of essays edited by Ian McBride, History and Memory in Modern Ireland. As McBride writes in the preface,

Beginning with the conviction that commemoration has its own history, the essays address questions concerning the workings of communal memory. How have particular political and social groups interpreted, appropriated, and distorted the past for their own purposes? How are collective memories transmitted from one generation to the next? Why does collective amnesia work in some situations and not in others? What is the relationship between academic history and popular memory?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

I, too, began with the conviction that commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising has its own history and honed in on the last question McBride poses: to distinguish between the academic history and the popular memory of the Rising. A student of history, I felt comfortable and confident that I could tackle the academic element of this project; however, fieldwork – the act of throwing myself out into Dublin to assess the “popular memory” of an event which transpired almost a century ago – was only a skill I began to study on this program and intimidated me immensely.

Perhaps because of this initial fear, I only reached out to the Dubliners I felt most comfortable interacting with, namely academics and those men and women approaching the Rising from an analytical and scholarly frame of reference. Pleasantly surprised by the number (and percentage!) of people who generously agreed to meet with me, I got carried away with interviewing informants who approach the question of commemoration from more or less the same background. I suppose they likewise felt comfortable with me because I had read enough of the history and historiography of the Rising to be able to carry on educated conversations in their field on study. It was only after I took a brief respite from darting around Dublin to reconvene with Aeveen that I realized I needed to broaden the demographics of my interviewees. Whereas at the outset of my project I was hesitant to meet with non-academics, I had attained a much more complex understanding of 1916 and felt more prepared to discuss the rebellion outside the framework of historical text, analysis, and revision.

In my attempt to examine the way the Easter Rising of 1916 has been commemorated, I sought to investigate as many of the agents of commemoration as possible: the media, through newspapers and films; the arts, visual and literary; the state, through museums and other public spaces; politicians, past and present; past scholars and current academics; educators, current teachers and the texts they use; and other Irishmen and Irishwomen who do not fit neatly into a category though are vital to the larger picture of popular cultural memory. With the risk of broadening the scope of my project too wide, I planned a trip to Belfast to meet with people who could offer a Northern Irish slant to my research. Unfortunately, my Belfast solicitations did not meet with the same success as my Dublin contacts; luckily the volumes in Belfast’s Linen Hall Library made my trip north worthwhile.

Due to the nature of my project, my ISP required a large sampling of written sources to compare the histories of the Rising as well as look into more abstract methods of commemoration. For preliminary work I compared a sampling of history survey texts in which I found a general consensus of the basic chronology of events, yet a difference of historical opinion regarding the rebel's understanding of the likelihood of success. Historians ranged in opinion from the "blood-sacrifice" camp, a judgment later brought into question by the revisionists, as in the case with Peter and Fiona Somerset Fry's account,

The rebels fought with desperate bravery as, during the following days, the British forces slowly moved in. In some areas they had considerable success; a mere seventeen rebel sharpshooters, fighting magnificently from houses overlooking Mount Street Bridge, held up the young English soldiers approaching from Dun Laoghaire for fifteen hours, causing heavy losses. Four British Officers were killed, fourteen wounded, and 214 other ranks killed and wounded. But the outcome was always, as the rebel leaders well knew, inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

J. J. Lee offers an antithetical view:

In the event, the Rising had turned into a blood sacrifice. But it had not been planned that way from the outset. Had the Rising been intended solely or even mainly as a blood sacrifice, it could have been mounted earlier in the war. It was planned to occur when the rebels felt they had the maximum chance of success, however limited this may have appeared in absolute terms...however profusely blood sacrifice sentiments spatter the latter writings of Pearse and MacDonagh, and however retrospectively relevant they appeared to be in the circumstances, it seems unhistorical to interpret these sentiments as the basis of the actual planning of the Rising.<sup>3</sup>

With a cognizance of the range of historical interpretations of the Rising, I was prepared to begin the fieldwork component of my research, discussed in the methodology section.

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<sup>2</sup> Fry, P. & F. S. (1988). A History of Ireland. London, Routledge, 290.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, J. J. (1989). Ireland 1912 - 1985: Politics and Society. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 25.

## METHODOLOGY

Whether luck, skill, or the pure generosity of Dubliners with their time – or, most likely, a combination of the three – my efforts to contact prominent Dubliners in my field of research were whole-heartedly rewarded. I had not anticipated the speed at which some of my informants-to-be would return my queries, which shortened the length and accelerated the pace of my reading period.<sup>4</sup> I aimed to familiarize myself with the history and historiography of the Rising in order to make the most of my interviews and not waste the informants' time. While researching my mapping project, I found that communication via mobile phones is a more standard procedure in Ireland than the US. Not completely accustomed to this Irish system of communication, I still preferred to contact people via email when possible, though I included my mobile number at the end of each message, a decision that paid off as many people chose to ring me back rather than reply over the internet.

With a busy schedule of interviews ahead of me, I filled the remaining gaps of my schedule with visits to museums and libraries while spending the evenings reading about the Rising. I read both historical accounts of the Rising from standard survey textbooks to a Leaving Certificate test-prep book and fictional accounts of the rebellion in drama (O'Casey, Friel), poetry (Yeats), and novel (Doyle). I watched the films *Michael Collins* to see a Hollywood depiction of the surrender and execution of the 1916 leaders and *Mise Eire* for actual footage of the event. Not sure if I would find any artwork related to the Rising, I stopped in at the National Gallery; although not pertinent to my research, the Jack Yeats exhibit impressed me and I lingered in the gallery. I approached the guard on duty to ask if he knew the birth order of the Yeats brothers; nearly an hour later, I learned William was the eldest, Jack the youngest, and this well-read guard's thoughts on the

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<sup>4</sup> While extraneous to the write-up of this ISP, one relevant anecdote must be shared: I was sitting at the computer terminal in the resource center on Dominick Street and I had just sent out a few emails to possible informants, two of whom were the co-authors of the commemorative book the *Irish Times* published on the Rising in 2006, Shane Hegarty and Fintan O'Toole. I was drafting another email when my mobile phone rings: it was Shane Hegarty! We scheduled a meeting for two days time right then because, as he explained, he just read my email and figured he might as well respond to it immediately. I was sincerely impressed (and grateful!)



1916 Rising and a recommended reading list for supplemental analysis.<sup>5</sup> This conversation was serendipity at its finest. It encouraged me to mention my interest in the Rising whenever possible to whomever I happen to meet; while most conversations never got off the ground, those that did helped shape my understanding of what the “average” Dubliner thought of the Easter Rising.

I had visited both Kilmainham Gaol and Collins Barracks earlier in the semester but returned to each with a more critical eye, specific to the Rising. Ironically, and unfortunately, the guard I spoke to at Collins Barracks could not offer the same breadth of knowledge as his equal at the National Gallery. I acquired a reader’s ticket at the National Library to access their collection of old newspapers and spent hours over the next few weeks looking over microfilm from 1916 and 1966. I squeezed in a very brief trip to Belfast to scour the Linen Hall Library collection. Although I spent only a day and a half in the library, the volumes are so well cataloged that I was able to sift through many documents relating or alluding to the events of 1916 with ease. Searching the internet, I found two online forums with relevance to the Rising – IndymediaIreland.ie questioning the current state of commemoration and Politics.ie<sup>6</sup> debating the supposedly proposed plan to turn the GPO into a museum and shopping center<sup>7</sup> – demonstrating that the historical significance of the Rising is still relevant to at least some Dubliners.

Also online was an advertisement for a 1916 walking tour given by two historians who had recently published a book on the Rising. Although technically the tour season ended before my ISP began, I got in touch with Lorcan Collins, one of the writers, who invited me to join a private tour for third-year Trinity history students.<sup>8</sup> I also went on the walking tour offered by the Sinn Fein bookshop; this tour was nearly a third of the cost of the first and ended up being a private tour as no one else showed up for the daily walk.<sup>9</sup> The two tours covered different parts of the city and while both guides supported the rebels, they approached the material differently, which I will discuss in more depth in the body of this paper.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for a full report of my conversation with the Jack Yeats museum guard.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix H for a reproduction of the two forum postings.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix K for a full report of the conversation with Gerard Bourke, representative from the Office of Public Works clarifying this claim.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B for the notes taken on the walking tour with Conor Kostick from TCD.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C for the notes taken on the walking tour with Pat from the Sinn Fein bookshop.

As for interviews, I met with six people in a formal setting: we prearranged a time and place to meet and I prepared questions to structure the conversation. I am hesitant to refer to these meetings as *interviews*; rather than proceed linearly through a list of questions, I prompted each person and steered the conversation but encouraged more of a flowing, dynamic dialogue. All my informants are academics of some type, a fact that should not be overlooked; while this allows me to publish their names and avoid matters of privacy and potential harm, it highlights the general similarity of – or lack of difference between – my informants. Moreover, not only may I refer to my informants by name, but as well-known scholars in their field, each of their names embodies an intellectual record that I must take into account as much as possible. As for a more balanced demographical list of informants, I chose to survey academics because it would lend itself to the closest comparison to what I can gather from the past; as I cannot ask the random Dubliner of 1966 when he or she thinks of the Rising, but I am able to read the academic literature on the subject, I did the same for gathering evidence in 2007. In regards to the lack of female informants, this is in part because female academics are not studying the Rising as much as men; however, as I will mention further on, this trend is reversing.

My first official meeting was with the *Irish Times* journalist and Assistant Features Editor, Shane Hegarty. I vacillated over the decision to use a microphone recorder during the conversation: admittedly, I was nervous to ask permission to use one in the first place. However, fear alone was not holding me back as I knew that as a reporter, Shane would understand the use of the recorder, but I was approaching the meeting as an opportunity to discuss the Rising and thought the recorder would be a superfluous addition, not to mention a chore to then later transcribe. In the end, I opted not to record our meeting and everything went well; I jotted down notes as Shane spoke and with particularly well-worded or pointed comments, I made sure to copy down the direct quote, asking Shane to repeat himself if necessary. Immediately after I left the Irish Times office I sat down and wrote more extensive comments on the experience and fleshed out the actual notes from the conversation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix D for a full report of my conversation with Shane Hegarty.

This technique worked well for this meeting and so I adopted it as practice, a mistake in retrospect. Whereas this method was appropriate for Shane Hegarty – a normal-paced speaker whom I felt comfortable enough with to ask him to repeat himself or slow-down if necessary – it proved to be inapt for other meetings, specifically my interview with Pat Cooke. Up until I met with Pat my routine served me well. Pat, however, spoke quickly and in neat, rapid-fire sentences dotted with well-packaged expressions, the type one might see as pull-quotes in a magazine article about commemorating the 1916 Rising.<sup>11</sup> I was not as comfortable with him as I found myself in previous meetings and therefore missed some of his clever expressions if my hand could not keep up with his tongue. I realized then that had I recorded each meeting, I would have had the option of transcribing the conversation afterwards; this way, if I thought it unnecessary, I would simply rely on my notes but would have had the opportunity to transcribe, if helpful.

To choose whom to contact for an interview, I approached the situation from the academic frame of reference first. I emailed two of the essayists who contributed to History and Memory in Modern Ireland – Professor David Fitzpatrick who ended up being out of town on sabbatical and Edna Longley who never got back to me. I also emailed both Dominic Bryan (again, no reply) and Bill Rolston in the hope that I could speak with them when I was in Belfast. Bill was willing to meet me but between his busy schedule and my short visit, our paths never crossed. In another effort to get a Northern Irish opinion, I emailed Professor McGarry of Queens University Belfast (QUB) because he lists on his webpage that his academic interests include both the 1916 Rising *and* commemoration; unfortunately though, again, no response. However, as already stated, both *Irish Times* journalists Fintan O'Toole and Shane Hegarty, co-authors *The Irish Times Book of the 1916 Rising*, agreed to meet, though in the end only Shane scheduled me into his calendar.

I had a very productive and encouraging meeting with my adviser, Elaine Coyle, in which she suggested a few other academics for me to contact; as she earned her masters degree at UCD and is currently working on her PhD at TCD, Elaine knows quite a number of Dublin's third-level educators. She thought UCD Professor of history

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix E for a full report of my conversation with Pat Cooke.

Michael Laffan would make for an interesting interview as she said he believes the Irish did more harm than good by fighting the British for their independence, a rare sentiment for an Irishman. I was pleased when Laffan agreed to meet me and not only did we discuss the Rising over coffee, I left UCD with four relevant articles he wrote.<sup>12</sup> As part of our field study course work, Aeven had arranged for each student to meet with a relevant person in our field to hone our interviewing skills; I was assigned Emily Mark FitzGerald, a UCD PhD candidate who wrote her dissertation on famine memorials.<sup>13</sup> Emily suggested I contact her colleague, Pat Cooke, who was in charge of Kilmainham and the Pearse museum before joining the UCD staff.

Nearly everyone I met in Dublin over the course of my ISP was susceptible to my initiation of a discussion on the 1916 Rising, my host family was no exception. My fifteen-year-old host brothers claimed they did not know as much about the Rising as they thought they should, though nonetheless thought Ireland should celebrate it more often. As a mini-experiment, I showed each of them individually the proclamation and the portraits of the seven signatories and asked them to match the names with the faces: struggling, they each identified Pearse and Connolly. I met with the twins' Oatlands College history teacher, Jack McGlade, to discuss how he approached the topic of the Rising in class;<sup>14</sup> although McGlade is an academic, his approach to the rebellion differs from that of a university professor. In an attempt to expand my informant demographics to outside a classroom, I met with Terry Fagan, a self-taught local historian with a Republican background.<sup>15</sup> After we spent an hour discussing Irish history from the 1913 lockout through the civil war, Terry offered to show me the different places on and around Moore Street where the drawn-out surrender of the Rising took place. This meeting was particularly poignant as Terry gave our SIT group a tour at the very beginning of our time in Dublin and so getting to walk the same areas with him again at the end helped me realize just how much I had grown over the course of the past few months and allowed me to appreciate just how much I have learned about Ireland, Dublin, and specifically the north side of the Liffey where the Rising took place.

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix F for a full report of my conversation with Michael Laffan.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix G for a full report of my conversation with Emily Mark FitzGerald.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix I for a full report of my conversation with Jack McGlade.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix J for a full report of my conversation with Terry Fagan.

## A HISTORY OF COMMEMORATION

### SELECTIVE MEMORY

About a month ago, we went around the classroom, each giving a brief summary of our final ISP proposal. I had just read History and Memory in Modern Ireland and the idea of academic history compared to popular memory was buzzing through my head: what a brilliant and fascinating course of study! I knew I was going to pursue this vein of research but only days previously had I decided upon the specific historical event of the 1916 Easter Rising. At this point my understanding of the event was minimal and the first historical account I read was the chapter titled “Blood Sacrifice” in A History of Ireland by Fiona and Somerset Fry. Their version depicts an honorable but militaristically pathetic rebellion in which they proffer Connolly’s anecdotal rejoinder when asked “on Easter Monday, what the chances were” of success: “he had replied with brisk cheerfulness: ‘None whatever.’”<sup>16</sup>

It was with this small and narrow impression of the Rising that I told the group I would be studying how the commemoration of 1916 has evolved and kept pace with the historical event. Aeven prodded me for a bit more and exuberantly I explained my fascination with Ireland’s dedication to commemorating such a “comedic failure.” This line raised a laugh from my peers but Aeven was slightly taken aback with the way I glibly described the Rising. After weeks of studying the 1916 Easter Rising, I am embarrassed to remember the ignorance of my comment. Yes, the Rising was a military failure; however, there is no way to sum up the actual event or its subsequent commemorations in any simple expression. Nonetheless, Aeven, like many Dubliners I met, perpetuates a particular memory of the Rising, a memory not void of bias.

My first official day of fieldwork brought me to the National Gallery. The man I spoke to provided insight that truly shaped the lens through which I viewed the next few weeks of research: popular memory, like any memory, is selective. From my introduction on the subject from History and Memory, I was aware of the discrepancies between academic history and popular memory, though I had yet to grasp the selectivity of this popular memory. The guard at the National Gallery spelled it out for me when he likened

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<sup>16</sup> Fry, P. & F. S. (1988). A History of Ireland. London, Routledge, 292.

the Easter week of 1916 to the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina: in the aftermath of both “disasters,” many people looted the ruined and abandoned shops. “People don’t like to be reminded of the looting” that took place in 1916, a parallel I had not considered. While I was not in Ireland when Hurricane Katrina struck to draw this parallel on my own, it never once occurred to me as I read account after account of the Sackville Street looting; had this similarity<sup>17</sup> been one the government or the Irish people wished to have remembered, I would have come across it somewhere in my extensive research. The heroic martyrs for the Irish Republic are easy commemoration fodder whereas lawless looters are not.

#### PATRIOTICALLY CORRECT

D. George Boyce explains this phenomenon within commemoration in his essay, “No lack of ghosts.” He reasons that the state funding used to commemorate events such as the 1916 Rising has narrowed the scope of possible tributes as the money source always dictates the final results. Boyce quotes William M. Johnston’s theory of “the European cult of anniversaries:”

Schools, universities, theaters, museums, literary organizations and cultural institutes abroad thrive on state funding. In return for investing in culture, state agencies expect these activities to enhance national identity. Intellectuals who get paid to organize and attend anniversary commemorations acquiesce in becoming retainers of the state. The device that more than any other eases such dependency is the cult of anniversaries.<sup>18</sup>

Evidence confirms Johnston’s notion that commemoration is on the government’s short leash. These agents of cultural socialization of which Johnston refers – namely the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks and Kilmainham Gaol – appear preoccupied with remaining apolitical and “politically correct,” a condition with which

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<sup>17</sup> To describe the looting of New Orleans in 2005 ‘similar to’ the looting of Sackville Street in 1916 is even too generous to the Irish history. In 1916, the looting was pervasive and unstoppable, but the goods stolen were luxury goods, not basic needs like food, often the items plundered in Louisiana. As Hegarty and O’Toole write in their account of Easter week, “A young girl passed [O’Malley] with a fan in her hand and a gold bracelet on her wrist. ‘She wore a sable fur coat, the pockets overhung with stockings and pale pink drawers: on her head was a wide black hat to which she had pinned streamers of blue silk ribbon.’” (*The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising*, page 75)

<sup>18</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 256.

Americans have become obsessed. For a period of time, “Irish historians were expected in some quarters to be Patriotically Correct,” a condition Americans similarly adopted after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks.<sup>19</sup> While this seemingly nonjudgmental approach to the Rising has not always been the agenda of the Irish government, this proved to be the current position.

At the National Museum of Ireland’s exhibit, *The Easter Rising: Understanding 1916*, there is a confusingly vague transition in the exhibition from the rebellion of 1916 to the civil war era, though a sign reads: “Remembering 1916: The disillusionment caused by civil war, partition, and economic hardship ensured that early commemorations of 1916 and the War of Independence were rather low-key.” An adjective more apt to describe the craic at a pub than a government sponsored ceremony, “low-key” is apparently how the government funded museum curates chose to articulate the early commemorations. Less euphemistic and a bit blunter, another sign reads:

Interpreting 1916: Different generations have commemorated 1916 in different ways. Academics and commemorators have disagreed in their interpretation of its significance, their opinions sometimes influenced as much by their own political leanings as by knowledge of the subject. Regardless of how one interprets its impact, however, there can be no doubt that a knowledge of 1916 and the events that followed is crucial to our understanding of the history and political development of modern Ireland.

The curators chose to simply acknowledge the Rising’s significance rather than join the “academics and commemorators” and attempt to interpret its significance.

Kilmainham jail took a less innocuous stance, though considering its role in the Rising, it is still a fairly unbiased and nonpartisan approach. On the third floor of the Kilmainham museum, there is a temporary exhibit of the 1966 commemoration efforts. The placard describing the exhibit explains:

As the provisional IRA’s campaign waxed and waned over the coming years, historians and cultural commentators challenged not only the Provisionals’ claim to be the inheritors of the 1916 tradition, but the validity of that tradition itself. It is a debate that is by no means over, and

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<sup>19</sup> Fanning, R. & Devlin, J., Ed. (1997). *Religion and Rebellion*. Dublin, 184. Incidentally, this new American staunch anti-terrorist sentiment had significant repercussions on the Northern Ireland situation.

lies at the heart of modern Ireland's attempts to adjust its identity to changing political realities.

Director of Kilmainham during the 1980s and 90s, Pat Cooke, refers to the jail as a "Republican shrine." Managing this shrine throughout the troubles was not simple; Pat approached his responsibility of museum curator with the focus of a "means of access," or in other words, to allow as many people as possible to share their views of the Rising in the exhibit. He approached the job as a way to explore nationalism and Republicanism "in its own terms, not on its own terms." In this regard, the jail tour guides provide a crucial part of the Kilmainham experience. Cooke writes of his arrival to the Kilmainham post: "Most of the voluntary guides who had conducted visitors around the building were proud and unapologetic nationalists and republicans. The exhibition, which had stood more or less unaltered since 1966, left no doubt as to the nature of the building as a shrine to patriotic sacrifice."<sup>20</sup> When Pat took over, he insisted the new wave of tour guides must not "join up the dots for the visitor," though he acknowledges that he was employed by – and working on behalf of – the state, which naturally bore some affect.

Just as museums have adjusted their approach to history to match contemporary sentiment, the media also alters its spin. While the *Irish Times* may have lambasted the Rising at the time – practically calling for the executions of the leaders outright, the *Irish Times* of 1916 dramatically comments, "The surgeon's knife has been put to the corruption in the body of Ireland and its course must not be stayed until the whole malignant growth has been removed."<sup>21</sup> – in 2006, the newspaper's tone was much different. Shane Hegarty, co-author of *The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising*, explained that he approached the task of writing the book for the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration as "straight forward a way as possible." He elaborated, listing the authors' three primary aims: firstly, to approach the Rising from the voices of the people who were there; secondly, to be apolitical; and lastly, to offer a narrative of the week rather than give it "spin." Shane believes the human-interest story often gets lost when teaching the Rising to students and hopes his book will reinstate that element of the story. When the *Irish*

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<sup>20</sup> Cooke, P. (2000). "Kilmainham Gaol: Interpreting Irish nationalism and Republicanism." *Open Museum Journal* 2, 3.

All other quotations are adapted from the informal interview found in Appendix E.

<sup>21</sup> O'Toole, F. & Hegarty, S. (2006). *The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising*, Gill & Macmillan, 165.



*Times* supplement came out in April of last year, that day's paper sold twice as many copies than normal. Hegarty attributes this to the fact that the public is not satiated with the information previously offered about the Rising and that "people have only been given parts of the story."<sup>22</sup>

THE BAGGAGE OF THE NORTH:  
A "GAELIC, CATHOLIC, 'BLOOD-SACRIFICE'" NO LONGER

As Ian McBride so eloquently proposes, there is "the possibility that present actions are not determined by the past, but rather the reverse: that what we choose to remember is dictated by our contemporary concerns."<sup>23</sup> Commemoration of 1916 ebbed and flowed with the heightening and calming of the troubles. Although I did not have the foresight to predict this finding before my project, it seems too obvious a discovery with hindsight. Proinsias O Drisceoil predicted in 1995 "commemoration is likely to become a primary site of cultural politics;"<sup>24</sup> However, Easter Rising commemorations were battlegrounds for cultural politics long before 1995.

When discussing his role in the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration, I asked Hegarty why there was a 90<sup>th</sup> remembrance at all – it seemed like an odd anniversary benchmark – and he surmised that the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries had to be sensitive due to the sectarian violence being committed in the name of a united republic up north and were therefore altered (some would argue, tainted.) The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary was an "expression of relief" that the government *could* commemorate; the mere existence of a 90<sup>th</sup> memorial implies that the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> tributes were negatively affected by the troubles, forcing the government to commemorate properly once the situation in the north deescalated. Others, such as Michael Laffan, harbor a suspicious view of the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration, assured it was merely a shrewd political move by Fianna Fail to garner support. Laffan admits his opinion is "cynical" but views the situation simply as a matter of "opportunism;" had the government wanted to wait for a respite from the northern conflict, they could have commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> or 85<sup>th</sup>, both dates after the ceasefire.

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<sup>22</sup> All quotations are adapted from the informal interview found in Appendix D.

<sup>23</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

Commemoration of 1916 in the Republic raised questions many southern Irish did not want to answer: is a partitioned island what the rebels of 1916 fought and died for? By celebrating the proclamation, are we ignoring the plight of our northern brethren? By condoning the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) of 1916 – which would later become the Irish Republican Army (IRA) – are we tacitly approving the Provisional IRA? Just as “in nineteenth-century Ireland folklore was fashionable, but only in so far as it could be accommodated within the dominant paradigm,”<sup>25</sup> 1916 commemoration was fashionable in so far as the violence in the north was at a minimum. An often-overlooked element of the 1916 Rising is that it laid the groundwork for the conflict that would surface later in the century as the IRB was originally created in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers. Therefore, the preoccupation with disassociating the IRB/IRA of 1916 with the Provisional IRA seems trivial when one understands the earliest histories of both the IRA and the UVF.

McBride maintains that “historians and remembrancers make uneasy companions, if not outright enemies.”<sup>26</sup> While southern republicans exercised selective memory, their estranged northern countrymen celebrated the very history they discounted. However, as Sinn Féin was trying to monopolize the rights to 1916, the historiography of the 1916 Rising was ever-lengthening. As the situation in Northern Ireland worsened, the nationalist school of thought was called into question by a revisionist movement. In 2006, Michael Laffan reflected on the forty years of Easter Rising commemoration since the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the majority of which were cast under the shadow of violence in the north. He explains that while much progress had been made in the field of Irish history, “once again, writers about the Irish past were expected to salute the flag. When almost all historians repudiated such professional treason they were accused of being anti-nationalist or even anti-national.”<sup>27</sup> Irish historians were torn between two loyalties: their country and their craft.

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<sup>25</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 264.

<sup>26</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 37.

<sup>27</sup> O'Collaghan, M. & Daly, M., Ed. (Forthcoming, December 2007). Commemorating 1916 in 1966. Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 338.

In Revising the Rising, a collection of essays on the topic of revisionism published in 1991, academics take a step back from the past decades of historiography to reevaluate. In the opening essay, “The Elephant of Revolutionary Forgetfulness,” Declan Kiberd illuminates the revisionist trend with a simple anecdote: when the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations were spare, rather than ask why the program was minimal, a reporter asked Taoiseach Haughey “why he was holding a ceremony at all.”<sup>28</sup> In a bold interpretation of the historiography, Pat Cooke holds the revisionist movement in contempt. He believes the “Gaelic, Catholic, ‘blood-sacrifice’” idea of the Rising was not questioned by the revisionist historians, but accepted. Cooke asserts, “Revisionist journalism endorses the myth [and] then attacks it as such.” Rather than deconstruct the myth and rebuild the history, the new wave of revisionist historians merely acknowledging the myth existed at all but go no further.

Regardless of the extent of their work, revisionist writings are constantly under scrutiny. Kiberd seeks to absolve the north of some of the blame they receive for the reactive revisionism of the time; while the troubles were the primary source for reevaluating the nationalist stance, universally, the Western romanticism toward the “freedom-fighter” morphed into hatred of the terrorist. This now-outdated romanticism can be found not too far in the past. In a picture booklet published for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising, the caption under the illustration of young soldiers reads: “On one occasion a youth was given high rank, and although only a mere school boy, fought and directed operations with amazing subtlety.”<sup>29</sup> Not only dramatic, this caption strikes a reader today as gravely ironic; with two world wars in the not-too-distant past and conscription terrorizing major Western countries such as the United States, the idea of a young boy thrust into a position of military power would have been frightening in 1966.

Despite the burden of the contemporary IRA on the conscience of the Republic, nearly every political party tried to claim the 1916 Rising as their own because Northern Irish conflict or not, “the declaration of the Irish nation that was read out in 1916 would become the cornerstone of much nationalist and republican belief for the remainder of the

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<sup>28</sup> Dorgan, T. & Dhonnchadha, M., Eds. (1991). Revising the Rising. Derry, Field Day, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Commemorative Pamphlet. (1966). Prelude to Freedom: 1916 - 1966 50th Anniversary. Dublin, Irish Art

twentieth century.”<sup>30</sup> As Tom Garvin writes in Revising the Rising, “When the Provos say they are the inheritors of the 1916 tradition, they are indeed right; but so are Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Worker’s Party, the Progressive Democrats, and any unaffiliated person who wishes to live as the free citizen of a free country.”<sup>31</sup> Predictably, the Republican cause pay homage to their ancestors: there has been a “sustained effort by Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA to present themselves as the sole legitimate heirs of the Easter Rising, the inheritors of the apostolic succession.”<sup>32</sup> Among many similar examples, the 1991 edition of the “Republican Resistance Calendar” is co-dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the 1981 hunger strike and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in the overt attempt to link the executed heroes of the past to the martyrs of the current generation.

However, less foreseeable groups also tried to lay claim to the Rising. As Connolly was a socialist, current socialist and Marxist groups usurp the Rising as their own. In a 1991 edition of “New Communism Review,” an article on the Easter Rising by Jim Stevens stresses the class struggle spirit of the Rising. The socialist sentiment of the 1916 Rising is arguable as the Irish Citizen Army was “a small force of never more than 300 [with] just about 200 of its members gathered at Liberty Hall to join Connolly in rebellion on Easter Monday”<sup>33</sup> out of a total of about 1,500 insurgents. Nonetheless, Stevens writes: “The struggle for national liberation from imperialism had united them all: left, centre, and right-wing supporters of Irish independence, religious and atheist, Protestant and Catholic, socialist and capitalist, utopian dreamer and hard-nosed materialist.”<sup>34</sup> Although Stevens’ comment is laced with a communist spin, he is not misrepresenting the facts: a motley group of soldiers from various armies united for the 1916 Rising. Stevens’ claim is not so far from Garvin’s; in fact, Garvin could have added “the Communist Party” to his long list of eligible organizations.

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<sup>30</sup> Cronin, M. (2001). A History of Ireland. New York, Palgrave, 194.

<sup>31</sup> Dorgan, T. & Dhonnchadha, M., Eds. (1991). Revising the Rising. Derry, Field Day, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Fanning, R. & Devlin, J., Ed. (1997). Religion and Rebellion. Dublin, 186.

<sup>33</sup> O’Toole, F. & Hegarty, S. (2006). The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising. Gill & Macmillan, 33.

<sup>34</sup> Stevens, J. (1991). “The Easter Rising.” New Communist Review **First Quarter**, 13.

A DIET OF REPUBLICAN HISTORY  
OR HISTORY ON A REPUBLICAN DIET?

The revisionist movement was so pervasive in the field of Irish history that it had a trickle-down affect, resulting in a continual change in the way history was taught over the lifespan of the Rising's commemoration. Kiberd explains, "If, in the bad old days, rote learning of the approved post-colonial line secured you a scholarship and a place in college, now, in the bad new times, it could land you a spot on late-night television."<sup>35</sup> A British "Then and There Series" schoolbook was published in 1979 to teach Anglo-Irish history. At the back of the text is a section called "How Do We Know?" which calls into question bias and other prejudices that might emerge when writing contentious history. Under the section "Things to Do," one of the classroom activities reads:

After the Easter Rising two young men and their girlfriends meet in Dublin. They were school-mates, but have not seen each other for a year. One man is on leave from the Western Front. The other took part in the Rising but escaped capture. Write a short sketch in which all four talk about what happened.<sup>36</sup>

It would have been unlikely for an Irish teaching guide to refer to the Western Front in 1979. According to Hegarty, in much of the revised history, thousands of Irishmen fighting for the British in the Great War – those that make up "the other side of history" – were cut from the storyline. Many northern loyalists choose to remember the Battle of the Somme as the key event in 1916 whereas Republicans commemorate the Rising. Hegarty stresses *both* groups of soldiers were Irish and believes the Somme and the Rising cannot and should not be disconnected; when Ireland commemorates the men of 1916, both the rebels and the Allied soldiers should be honored.

However, for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising in 1991, the calendar of events announces that secondary schools "will be invited to debate the merits of the 1916 Rising in Irish and English."<sup>37</sup> As Pat Cooke succinctly said, commemoration is a "function of the temperature of the political climate." In 1991, the troubles had still to be resolved and so the phrasing of the secondary school assignment reflects this; it is much more likely

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<sup>35</sup> Dorgan, T. & Dhonnchadha, M., Eds. (1991). Revising the Rising. Derry, Field Day, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Power, E. G. (1979). The Easter Rising and Irish Independence. London, Longman, #3.

<sup>37</sup> 1916 Anniversary Committee. (1991). Souvenir Programme, Reclaim the Spirit of Easter 1916 75th Anniversary Committee.

that for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary the students would have been “invited to discuss the importance,” or given some equally pro-Rising assignment. David Fitzpatrick asserts, “the commemorative ceremony was itself a teaching tool, reinforcing the lessons from books or conversation with powerful visual and aural imagery.”<sup>38</sup> The film *Mise Eire*, released in 1959 with actual footage from Sackville Street in 1916, was shown at commemorations for this very purpose because seeing the Rising stirs up a much more visceral understanding than reading from a textbook. An exaggerated example of just how dry a textbook can be is the 1995 edition of Mentor Publications’ study guide for the Higher Level History Leaving Certificate. A mere three pages are dedicated to the Rising – a page fewer than the section devoted to Padraig Pearse – and the statistic, “Damage estimated at £2.5m had been caused to property,” falls short of the image of Sackville Street in *Mise Eire*.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps oversimplified, anesthetized accounts of the Rising like the one offered in the study guide is why Pat Cooke adamantly denies the common misconception in 1991 that the public was “super saturated” with 1916 commemoration. When Pat questioned a random sample of people on Grafton Street, very few of those stopped seemed to know much about the Rising, let alone to a point of saturation.<sup>40</sup> A significant percentage of this “saturation” would come from one’s education. The example given in the methodology section of my fourth-year host brothers’ ability to name only the two notables of the Rising indicates the emphasis their school puts on the Rising; both good students, the twins would have been able to name all seven signatories had that been a priority in their history class in school. When contrasting the way history is taught today compared to previous generations, the twins’ history teacher, Jack McGlade, thinks students today have a “more rounded understanding” of Irish history. During Jack’s time at school, “the period of 1916-1918 tended to be skipped over a bit.”<sup>41</sup> Today’s Leaving Certificate students get more of a detailed history of the Home Rule party. McGlade verbalized the

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<sup>38</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 185-6.

<sup>39</sup> O’Brien, E. (1995). *Modern Ireland 1868 – 1966 History Essays for Leaving Cert*. Mentor Publications, 76.

<sup>40</sup> Cooke, P. (2000). "Kilmainham Gaol: Interpreting Irish nationalism and Republicanism." *Open Museum Journal* 2, 8.

<sup>41</sup> All quotations are adapted from the informal interview found in Appendix I.

obvious fact: the further you're removed from the historical event, the more objective you can be about it.

Terry Fagan, a local historian of McGlade's generation, reiterates Jack's perception. When I sat down to talk to Terry, he unabashedly clarified he was raised on a "diet of Republican history." As Terry asserts, years ago children were taught Irish history and nationalist songs in school though the tradition has died out; perhaps the education students receive now is on a Republican diet. Pat Cooke laments the decreasing number of students choosing to study history in secondary schools, a symptom he attributes to the fact that "nationalism is diluted in the battle for globalization," or in other words, students opt to study business rather than history in a ever-expanding global market. The natural corollary follows that if nationalism is diluted, historical consciousness is also diluted. Whereas Cooke's lamentation seemed like a rehearsed grievance given from the armchair of a practiced intellectual, Fagan bemoaned the same issue while we were standing on O'Connell Street. Explaining that the 1916 commemoration plaques were posted so high above eye-level so as not to interfere with the storefront displays, Fagan offered, "commerce supercedes history" and "money is god" to some Irish today.

#### THE RISING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Before all history is lost to consumerism, the women of the Rising will finally secure the academic attention they have always deserved. Although long overdue, texts devoted to the women's contribution to the rebellion are just now joining the extensive list of titles on the 1916 Easter Rising. Terry Fagan and Pat, the Sinn Fein bookshop tour guide, both emphasized the understated importance of women in the Rising. Of all the informants, Terry and Pat best understood the mechanics of Rising; with an impressive knowledge of the day-to-day proceedings, they showed me each alleyway and corner of rebel significance. It is striking that those with the best working knowledge of the Rising's moving parts were the only ones to lament the loss of the women's portion of history. Fagan explained that the women were an integral part of the rebellion – "the backbone" of the Rising – but long overlooked and left out of the accounts, as it was men who wrote the history.

Terry rattled off anecdote after anecdote featuring brave and influential women of the Rising, one of which Pat recounted as well. They referred to a photograph taken on April 29<sup>th</sup> of Pearse delivering the rebel surrender to British General Lowe: if examined closely, a second, smaller pair of boots emerge from under Pearse's overcoat though there is no evidence of a corresponding body! Easily unnoticed but quite clearly there, Terry and Pat contend these are the feet of Cumann na mBan nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, her body airbrushed out of the picture and out of history. *The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising* prints this photograph with the caption, "Lowe is accompanied by his son, while hidden from view behind Pearse is Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, who had conveyed messages between rebels and military."<sup>42</sup> The difference between being inadvertently hidden and deliberately airbrushed out of the picture is huge; whichever is the case, either way, O'Farrell has been left out of the history. However, the Easter Rising is not exempt from the growing trend to rewrite history to include those who did not fall under the category of the comfortable, white male. While new scholarship is available on the women of the Rising, these books are exclusively about the women, little better than the texts exclusively of men; Terry Fagan wisely suggests scholars should "marry the two" histories together.

As women are finally receiving the credit they deserve, one wonders, is it too late, is the Rising not already over-commemorated? The majority of informants believe the 100th anniversary will mark a temporary end to the commemoration chronicle, though 2016 will be a significant slice in the large history. Hegarty anticipates the 100th anniversary to be a "blank slate" as there will be no survivors still living and also free of the "baggage of the north," a relief as the Republic now "knows violence [and] shame" in regards to the six partitioned counties of Ulster. Perhaps the last commemoration of the event for a long time, Hegarty is eager to get the British involved for the first time in the Rising's commemoration history. Laffan offered a less enthusiastic prediction, scoffing as he envisaged a ceremony "gross...obsessive...[and] far more flamboyant than the 50th," with heavy doses of "spin."

On the website Politics.ie there is an online forum discussing the future plans of the GPO. Gerard Bourke, a representative from the Office of Public Works (OPW),

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<sup>42</sup> O'Toole, F. & Hegarty, S. (2006). *The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising*, Gill & Macmillan, 133.



clarified the rumors posted on the website. Bourke confirmed that the GPO will be converted into a museum by 2016 – to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising – but that it will not be a shopping center like many forum posters contended. Bourke admitted he “doesn’t really know what to do with the space” and is not sure what would be appropriate to put in the museum, especially since there are already two permanent exhibits dedicated to 1916 at Kilmainham Jail and Collins Barracks. Bourke seemed daunted by the task of creating yet another homage to the 1916 Rising; although only my interpretation, the tone of his voice implied exasperation with the government’s perceived need to over-commemorate this one event.

David Fitzpatrick writes in his essay, “Commemoration in the Irish Free State”: “For better or worse, Irish public life continues to dwell in imagined pasts as well as an equally fictionalised present, the link being most powerfully expressed through commemoration.”<sup>43</sup> One crucial element of this imagined past is how many people picture Dublin in 1916. Roddy Doyle’s fictionalized account of a young orphan who enlists in Connolly’s Citizen Army for the uprising paints a compelling picture of the sordid Dublin slums. In a factual anecdote, a higher-up in the Rising, O’Donovan, later recalled, “I asked myself, “What impulse urges these men to fight?” Certainly not the hope that they will get anything out of it. What have they to fight for? A country. Yes, but how much of it? A room or two in a tenement.”<sup>44</sup> On the Sinn Fein walking tour Pat quoted the statistic that one in every seven children in Dublin go to bed hungry today though Ireland is now one of the world’s richest countries. He pointed to the Burger King below a 1916 commemoration plaque and asked, “Is this what [the rebels] fought for?” The ideals of 1916 are commemorated but are they practiced?

Pat laughed as he offered the unique metaphor of likening the 1916 Rising to the Republic in its teenage years. The “pockmarks of the bullet holes [still visible on O’Connell Street] are like its acne” and while the Rising was immature, the Republic has matured since then. When the government tries to fill in the bullet holes, Pat worries that by covering up the past, Ireland will have an easier time forgetting it. The guard at the National Gallery reiterates this sentiment: smiling, he said the Irish have a tendency to

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<sup>43</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 186.

<sup>44</sup> O’Toole, F. & Hegarty, S. (2006). The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising, Gill & Macmillan, 23.

sweep things under the carpet, and he showed me with his hand – raised, about 3 feet from the floor – how high the carpet has risen. The photograph printed on the title page was taken this month on Moore Street. To the undiscerning eye, “Remember 1916, Save 16 Moore St.” would be glanced over, as is most graffiti. In the upper-left-hand corner of the picture there is a plaque on the brick wall. This small sign is the only token erected to 16 Moore Street, the fishmonger’s shop elected for the rebel headquarters where later the leaders held a “council of war.”<sup>45</sup> A poster of each of the seven signatories is pasted to the metal storefront covering though they are ripped and peeling. Ironically, today Moore Street is used mainly by Dublin’s immigrant population, people to whom the Rising occupies a small place in larger, multinational histories.

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<sup>45</sup> O'Toole, F. & Hegarty, S. (2006). The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising, Gill & Macmillan, 130.

## CONCLUSION

Some history is “less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and re-emergence of their significations; less interested in ‘what actually happen’ than in its perpetual reuse and misuse; its influence on successive presents.”<sup>46</sup> I began my research with the intention of comparing the academic history of Easter week to how popular memory has canonized the Rising. I soon realized the heart of the question lay not in the discrepancies between what actually happened and what is remembered to have happened, but how this cultural memory has changed over the course of years of commemoration. I found that this memory is selective and the political climate in Northern Ireland often dictated its selectivity; moreover, this discerning approach affected scholars and non-academics alike, inciting a revisionist movement, which led to a backlash of a more neutral stance, neither republican nor anti-nationalist. And now, as historians modernize their trade, previously ignored groups – in the case of the Rising, influential women – are getting their deserved time in the spotlight.

In conclusion, I must acknowledge my personal discoveries as well as my academic findings. As an American, I bring certain prejudices and qualities to my research. At the outset of my research, it struck me as odd that Ireland did not celebrate a day of independence, though no obvious date jumps out for observance. However, hypocritically, when I try to conjure up the historical significance of July 4<sup>th</sup>, I am at a loss. This illustrates the possibility of disconnect between any historical event and the way it is remembered and commemorated. Were there barbeques and fireworks on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776? Did everyone wear red, white and blue? What can one infer about the political climate in the United States based on the number of American flags flying at a given moment? By researching the commemorative history of the 1916 Rising, I began to see the parallel issues prevalent in the United States. Moreover, it became clear that Ireland

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<sup>46</sup> McBride, I., Ed. (2001). History and Memory in Modern Ireland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 41-2.

and the US are not unique: every country picks and chooses which events to glorify and honor – it is merely an element of politics and nation building.

The weeks leading up to the ISP period unnerved me; the three weeks of ISP research proved to be the highlight of my time in Ireland. Whereas I had made strides in personal growth and self-reliance during my small mapping project, the growth and confidence gained during my ISP was proportionate to the significantly longer research period. Finding myself confident enough to seek out interviews and then comfortable enough to carry on intellectual discussions with my informants was empowering but also rewarding; I had worked hard to build up my understanding of the material. Research aside, I appreciated the chance to finally get to know Dublin more intimately. As a group, we never spent more than a few weeks at a time based in Dublin, and even then, we were commuting in and out of Dominick Street each day. For the first time I had the city at my disposal and I took advantage of the opportunity.

The final paper was never my focus, the research and experience were. Now having written the paper, I am pleased to look back and see all the disparate events – planned meetings, chance conversations, guided tours – and pages of reading come together. My research encompassed far more than I was able to cram into the confines of this essay; however, what I have omitted in writing may be read between the lines as every little bit helped formulate my final thoughts for this project. Despite obtaining more than enough material for my assignment, I was tempted to spend even more time in the field researching, there was so much more I could have done! Prepared for a remark like this, Aeven reminded me, “Stop the research, even if you are convinced that you are not finished. You never will be finished.” Even now, some 9,000 words later, I do not feel finished; though looking back on the past month, I do feel accomplished.

Pat Cooke articulated, “1916 is an ingredient in contemporary consciousness,” and therefore the commemoration will be a “function of the temperature of the political climate.” 2016 is nine years away but already the government is planning for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Much could change the political climate over the course of the next decade; perhaps a future SIT student will elect to investigate the centennial commemoration and shed light on the loose ends of my research.

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## **Interviews**

Informal conversation with the guard on duty in the Yeats museum, National Gallery of Ireland, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 9:30am.

Informal interview with Shane Hegarty, the Irish Times Offices, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 10am.

Informal interview with Emily Mark FitzGerald, University College Dublin (UCD), November 8<sup>th</sup>, 10am.

Informal interview and walking tour with Conor Kostick, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and around D1 and D2, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1pm.

Informal conversation with Michael and Conor Healy, Healy home stay, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 9pm.

Informal interview with Micahel Laffan, UCD, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 10am.

Informal phone conversation with Gerard Bourke of the Public Works Office, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 4pm.

Informal interview with Jack McGlade, Oatlands College, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 9:30am.

Informal interview with Pat Cooke, UCD, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am.

Informal interview and walking tour with Terry Fagan, Kylemore Café on O'Connell Street, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 12pm.

## APPENDIX A

Informal conversation with the guard on duty at the Jack Yeats exhibit in the National Gallery of Ireland

November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 9:30 am

I was looking at the Jack Yeats exhibit and though not sure if he would know the answer, I asked the guard on duty which brother was older, Jack or William Butler. The guard – I never got his name, an error I only realized after the fact – gave me a brief summary of the four Yeats siblings. Once the guard's friendliness and knowledge became evident, I told him about the research I was just beginning and about the SIT program. The following notes were taken from this conversation.

The guard confirmed what the woman at the information desk told me – no artist who was moved to paint the Rising was showcased in the National Gallery – but he suggested I look at *An Allegory*, by Sean Keating.\* He explained the symbolism: the two men on the left represent the Church and the State, the woman and her child symbolize the hope for the future, Keating paints himself slumped against a tree, and the two men on the right embody the Republican and nationalist sides digging the same grave in opposite directions. We got off the topic of art and onto the Easter Rising, a subject the guard has clearly read a lot about as he rattled off a list of books he thought would be helpful for my project (*On Another Man's Wounds* by O'Malley, *The Myths of 1916* by Neeson, *A Star Called Henry* by Doyle, *The 1916 Rising* by Coogan).

He told me the Irish joke that if you added up everyone's ancestors who were supposedly in the GPO Easter week, there would have been over 20,000 rebels, implying that everyone wants to claim a part in the Rising. The guard drew a fascinating parallel between Easter week 1916 and the effects of Hurricane Katrina: in the aftermath of both 'disasters,' many people looted the ruined shops. "People don't like to be reminded of the looting" that took place in 1916, the guard told me, a parallel I had not considered. He also explained how a few years after the civil war, schools didn't teach Irish history because it was too contentious. This is where he attributes the widespread myths, reasoning they grew in this vacuum. Smiling, he said the Irish have a tendency to sweep things under the carpet and he showed me with his hand [about 3 feet from the floor] how high the carpet has risen.

We then got into a discussion of the IRA, the original IRA and the provisional faction and how people try to distance the 1916 IRA with the IRA involved with the troubles. He commented on the fact that recently "terrorist" has become a buzzword, which has forced Ireland to reexamine its history, specifically of the IRA. He claims the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration was "hijacked" because all the political parties tried to claim it as their own, but as he said, "nobody had the monopoly on the pain and suffering."

\*After our conversation I went to find Keating's work. The placard explained the painting expressed the "loss of ideals for Ireland as a consequence of the civil war and Keating's own bitter disillusionment."

## APPENDIX B

1916 Walking Tour with Conor Kostick, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 1pm

I met the group of Trinity history students at the Campanile and for the tour we walked around the area near Trinity and then to Connolly's statue and then finished at the GPO. I would describe the experience more as a walking *lecture* than a walking *tour*, though it made for an interesting lecture. Conor was not as friendly as some of the other professors I have met with and seemed to be more occupied with the business element of the tour than anything else as at the end of the tour I hoped to ask him some questions but instead he awkwardly asked for my payment and then quickly hurried off.

Conor first explained to us that David Fitzpatrick's\* students would walk out of his lecturers when he taught the rising because it was controversial at the time. Now the approach has been changed drastically. Apparently the military bureau has only released relevant 1916 documents two to three years ago. These documents were personal statements of the army survivors' accounts of the Rising and the government would only release them once they all were dead. Kostick doesn't think the Rising was a "blood sacrifice" like some historians have said; he sees no evidence at all to support this and believes the gritty accounts of the fighting demonstrate how the rebels thought they had a chance. Conor attributes three factors which shifted to give the rebels this faith: Britain lacked military numbers/pressure in Ireland because their soldiers were stretched thin with the Great War; the attitude of the German government with Roger Casement and the *Aud* was promising; and finally, the political development of the Irish Volunteers also showed potential. Conor explained that the "British didn't have a clue about the IRB" but they were a small group so when the Irish Volunteers (numbering around 70,000) signed up for the cause, the IRB was thrilled. Not all Irish volunteers were as keen as the IRB for a rebellion and Kostick told the amusing anecdote of why the *Aud* never docked: the men driving the car to meet the ship to pick up the arms did not use their headlights for fear of being caught...consequently they drove off the cliff and into the sea where all three passengers drowned and the *Aud's* captain was forced to scuttle his ship. These changes clearly factored into the failure of the Rising before it even began.

Conor then spoke on the actual events of the Rising. It was Easter Monday, a bank holiday, which was always a big day at the races. The British soldiers had the day off to go to the races and so the rebels pretty much just walked inside the GPO and took over. This was completely serendipitous luck because the original Rising was planned for that Sunday, a day before the races. Another funny anecdote is that anxious not to be considered looters, Plunkett and his rebels boarded a tram and then offered to pay the 57 fares and the driver looked at him like he was mad and told him when you are leading a rebellion, you don't need to pay the fare. Kostick was trying to make the rebels out as gentlemen, practically! He explained that every place the rebels took over or looted, they left a note saying the Republic would repay all damages; while Conor seemed to think this was noble, I am not so sure I agree.

When I got to speak to Conor as we were walking, I mentioned my project and its element of commemoration. Kostick said that the commemoration and public opinion of the Rising has ebbed and flowed with the situation in the north. He explained that big



Ulster businessmen formed the original UVF, likening the situation to the idea that it was as if Bill Gates decided to create a Seattle army and ask for volunteers. This Ulster army – which the British weren't happy about, incidentally – was what turned “poets” like Pearse into rebels.

Talking to one of the third-year Trinity students, I asked one boy how history was taught when he was growing up, specifically the 1916 Rising. He said, “I was taught the traditional nationalist-sympathetic history with the Rising as the apotheosis of all our history.” Well, he certainly understood my question and he certainly had thought about it previously to have come up with such a succinct and powerful response. While he seemed a bit critical in his judgment of this history, he added that he has a copy of the proclamation with the seven signatories hanging on his bedroom wall.

Conor agrees with J. J. Lee that there is a tendency to over emphasize the fact that people jeered at the leaders when they were caught; those who jeered were the poor who were relying on British poor relief handout each week and because of the disruption, they didn't receive it that week and both this fact and the threat of not getting it ever if the Republic succeeded made them bitter. Kostick finished the tour by saying that the Easter Rising was like the signing of the declaration of independence: it was the spark that set the events of independence in motion.

\* Conor referred to Fitzpatrick as if we all knew who he was – and I assume the other students must have, as he is a TCD professor– and I recognized the name was the author of the essay in History and Memory whom I already emailed.

## APPENDIX C

Walking Tour with Pat from the Sinn Fein bookshop, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 11:30am

One other person and I showed up for the daily tour offered by the Sinn Fein bookshop of Dublin, “the city that fought an empire!” as they put it on their flyer. Pat was our tour guide and although the tour was billed as a walking tour of the fight for Irish freedom, including 1916, when he asked if we had any specific interests, I told him I’d like to hear anything he has to offer on the Rising. Pat wore two lapel pins: a tri-color Easter lily and a 25 years anniversary pin of the H-Block hunger strikers.

We didn’t cover much ground – around Parnell Square and then down in the Moore Street area – though for an hour and a half, Pat showed us which buildings were used by the IRB, Michael Collins’ twelve apostles, and all other Republican groups, violent and otherwise. Pat began the tour at the bookshop that also houses the production team of *An Phoblacht*, Dublin’s Republican newspaper. He stressed the importance of the Republican newspapers throughout history, claiming they gave the rebels their purpose and informed those who were not directly involved. He explained that newspapers always cater to a certain audience and the Republican audience has had a consistent paper throughout the ages even though they often are shut down. Different papers report the news differently, of course, and as Pat said, “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

We passed Kevin Barry Hall and Pat told us the heroic story of Barry and his supposed last line when confronted with the noose the British aimed to hang him with: “Yeah, that looks like it’ll be strong enough to hold me.” Pat explained that despite what others may say, there is no real controversy over who was or should have been the president of the Republic – Pearse or Clarke – as the rebels only set up a *provisional* government with intentions of having elections for the real first president. When the topic of the planning of the Rising arose during the tour, Pat said the notion that the Rising was a mistake and home rule would have triumphed without it is “pure crap”; Pat reasons if the IRB had not risen, the Citizen’s Army or Clan na Gael or some other group would have rebelled alone. Another “myth perpetuated by an awful lot of people” that Pat wanted to set straight was that the IRA remained a consistent group, representing the Republican movement. The myth that there was an “old IRA” or an “official” or “provisional” faction is not true; there might have been “chipped off” groups but the IRA remained consistent.

We stopped at the Garden of Remembrance on Parnell Square, a memorial constructed in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising. It was supposed to honor both the Irish fighting in the Great War for the British and the rebels but some locals took care of the plaque giving credit to the soldiers and it now is just a site “for those who gave their lives for Irish freedom.” Inside the cross-shaped fountain are the Gaelic broken spears, a symbol for the end of war. An Aisling poem about the Rising is etched into the stone behind a sculpture.

Much of the tour was dedicated to the civil war and Michael Collins’ handprint on the city but Pat gave a fair representation of the 1916 events, too. He said that you can still see many of the bullet holes on the buildings on O’Connell Street though at one point

the government started to fill them in but he and other locals stopped them. Pat laughed as he gave us this metaphor: he views 1916 as the Republic in its teenage years. The “pockmarks of the bullet holes are like its acne” and while the Rising was immature, the Republic has matured since then. He thinks that by covering up the past it is much easier to forget it. He pointed to the Burger King below a 1916 commemoration plaque and asked, “is this what they fought for?” Pat quoted the statistic that one in every seven children in Dublin go to bed hungry now and he doesn’t think that is what the rebels would have hoped for. The “democratic program” the leaders set up in 1919 still is not in effect.

Like Terry Fagan, Pat made sure to give credit to the 200+ women of the Rising who were “written out of history.” In one case, Elizabeth O’Farrell literally was erased from history when someone airbrushed her out of the photograph of Pearse surrendering. In regards to the surrender, Pat says the whole “blood-sacrifice” notion is “pure bullshit” as the rebels aimed to “re-instill a sense of Irish pride” and he believes the results of the next election – with 73 seats going to Sinn Fein – proves that they were successful. Pat suggested I go to Kilmainham jail and ended the tour by saying he doesn’t think it’s a coincidence that the one man who the British didn’t execute – de Valera – was the only man with whom they knew they could strike a deal.

## APPENDIX D

Informal interview with Shane Hegarty, journalist and Assistant Features Editor of the *Irish Times* at the Irish Times Offices on Tara Street  
November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 10 am

I followed the instructions Shane gave me over the phone when I arrived: I signed in as a visitor and the receptionist called Shane in his office to notify him that I was waiting. Shane came downstairs and signed for me and the security guard let us through. We took the elevator to the seventh floor café. Overlooking the city center, we conversed about the Rising and Irish history in general over a cup of coffee.

In Shane's opinion, the 1916 Rising is still "very raw...very Irish" and reminded me that the event is just 90 years old. I asked him how he thought the centennial celebration will go and he replied that by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary he believes the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland will be unified economically as one country, which will make for quite a different commemoration, as the commemorations of the past have been tainted – or at least affected – by the conflict in the north. In Shane's view, the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration was: "restrained...dignified...respectful" and there was "pride in it." He explained that there was a big discussion as to whether or not to have a military presence in the commemoration ceremony and the government decided to include the military. Overall, the "tone seemed to be right" and it was a "commemoration not a celebration." With the comment the National Gallery guard fresh in my mind, I asked Shane about the use of the word "terrorist" and he said when writing the book he used the term "insurgents" though that now has new meaning as well from the Iraqi war.

I asked why there was a 90<sup>th</sup> to begin with – it seemed like an odd anniversary to me – and he guessed that because the troubles were going on during the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, those commemorations had to be sensitive and were therefore altered and in some ways tainted. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary was an "expression of relief that they could [commemorate]" at all. He was pleased I asked this question and said it is absolutely pivotal to understanding the Rising commemoration: the fact the government had a 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration demonstrates how difficult a topic commemoration is and implied the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> were negatively affected by the troubles, forcing the government to commemorate properly once the northern situation calmed down. He reminded me, part of the commemoration is the discussion/debate is about *how* to commemorate. When I asked what he thought the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary would be like, he mused, it "won't have the baggage of north" on the country and government's consciences for one thing. Right now the Republic "knows violence, knows shame" in regards to the north. The 100<sup>th</sup> will be a "blank slate" without survivors and will be the last commemoration of the event for a long time. Shane is keen to get the British involved for this monumental event.

I asked him how he approached the task of writing the book for the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration and he quickly explained, as "straight forward a way as possible." He elaborated, saying how he and Fintan O'Toole, his co-author, wanted to approach the Rising from the voices of the people who were there; to be apolitical; and to offer a narrative of the week rather than give it a spin. He and Fintan were interested in how the history of the event is taught and aimed to show young 14- and 15-year-olds that boys

their age were picking up guns and fighting back in 1916. Shane believed that the human interest story often gets lost when teaching the Rising to students and hoped his book would bring that back. When the *Irish Times* supplement came out, the day's paper sold twice as many copies than normal. Shane attributes this to the fact that the public is not satiated with the information previously offered about the rising; the public wants to know more about it, "people have only been given parts of the story." According to Hegarty, in a lot of the revised history, thousands of Irishmen have been cut out from the storyline, those that make up "the other side of history": the ones fighting for the British in the Great War. Some groups in the north remember the Battle of the Somme like the Republic supports the Rising though Shane stressed both groups of soldiers were Irish. Shane was very clear that he believes the Somme and the Rising cannot be disconnected; when we commemorate the men of Rising, we must commemorate the nationalists too as they also fought for Ireland only in different uniforms.

As for research for the supplement (which was expanded into a book,) he said they used a "resource of material recently released" and made sure I grasped that this demonstrates how sensitive the Rising is. (Hegarty explained to me that there are two things the Irish will not discuss: the civil war and criticisms of de Valera, both offshoots of the Rising.) The reason it was not available to the public was because the government waited until everyone involved in the documents had died before releasing it. Shane believes this shows the sensitivity of the issue and highlights the bitter fact that Irish killed other Irish. He suggested I check out the national archives to read them myself. Shane also suggested I find Roy Foster's book Look at the Irish (or a title like that) and to look into the artist Sam Stephenson who was involved with the 75<sup>th</sup> commemoration.

## APPENDIX E

Informal interview with Pat Cooke, director of the MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management, UCD at his office at University College Dublin in Belfield  
November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 10:30 am

I met Pat at his office in the Arts/Newman Building. He had emailed me an essay he wrote on his role at Kilmainham so I had read that in preparation for our meeting. He had a busy day but generously squeezed me into his schedule.

I told Pat that I read in the preface of Revising the Rising that the collection of essays was his brainchild, and asked him what made him desire a conference to commemorate the 1916 Rising in the first place? He replied that back in 1991, there was what he called the “don’t-mention-the-war syndrome in the south.” He elaborated, saying that those in the Republic had become apathetic to the Rising; rather than struggle with the issues (of the Northern Irish troubles and its connection to the war for independence,) people chose to ignore them. Some argued that by 1991 the public was “super saturated” with commemoration but when Pat performed the random sampling on the street (which he references in his article, “Kilmainham Gaol: Interpreting Irish nationalism and Republicanism”), very few people he and his team stopped seemed to know much about the rising, let alone to a point of saturation. According to Pat, by 1991, the general public was “apathetic and ignorant and confused about how they should feel about the past.” Since the Good Friday Agreement, Pat has noticed a difference in people in the sense that they are more comfortable with investigating the past. Self-described as one who “managed two Republican shrines throughout the troubles,” Cooke said he tried to keep people engaged and not turned off by their national history.

The discussion then turned to his involvement with Kilmainham. Pat explained to me that he approached his responsibility of museum curator with the focus of a “means of access,” or in other words, to allow as many people as possible to share their views of the Rising in the exhibit. He approached the job as a way to try to explore nationalism and Republicanism “*in its own terms*, not *on its own terms*.” In this regard, the tour guides are a crucial part of the Kilmainham experience. Pat insists they must not “join up the dots for the visitor.” Cooke reminded me though that he was employed by the state and was working on behalf of the state and this always factors into his decisions. When he was working at Kilmainham he tried to convince *all* political parties to refrain from using Kilmainham as a site for meetings or speeches. At the same time, “the very identity of the state is bound up with the Rising,” and therefore, it is bound up with the jail. Pat likened the situation to a father-son relationship: the father, the Rising, begot the son, current Irish government. For the son to turn his back on his father would be unfair.

When the term “celebrate” is used to describe the festivities of an anniversary, it frames it in a positive way, but a closed and positive way. Cooke prefers the term “explore” to “celebrate” because it implies the question is always open; he thinks revisionist history “suggests it is closed.” In 1991 he organized an art exhibit (also mentioned in the article) with an open agenda to use art as a way to explore Kilmainham. I asked how he thought the 2016 commemoration will go and he said, “1916 is an ingredient in contemporary consciousness,” and therefore the commemoration will be a

“function of the temperature of the political climate.” He hopes the public feels comfortable enough to celebrate it and explore it. He also explained how the study of history is on the decline in secondary schools that he attributes this to the fact that “nationalism is diluted in the battle for globalization.” The corollary to this is that if nationalism is diluted, historical consciousness is also diluted.

When I mentioned the revisionist history written on the Rising, he said it was “an aggressive form of revisionism, not sympathetic to nationalism.” The first historians “streamlined Pearse” so that he is the face of the Rising and the “Pearse text becomes the bible of 1916.” According to Pat, the “Gaelic, Catholic, Blood-Sacrifice” idea of the Rising was not questioned by the revisionists, but accepted: “revisionist journalism endorses the myth then attacks it as such.”

In the last minutes of our meeting, I asked him about the specific part of the Kilmainham museum that showcases the last words of the executed prisoners, a choice of exhibition style that intrigues me. He said they “tried to create a mood” about the last days, to show that they did not all die with a peaceful state of mind and that it is never an easy thing to give up your life.

## APPENDIX F

Informal interview with Michael Laffan, Associate Professor for the school of History & Archives, UCD, at a cafe at University College Dublin in Belfield  
November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 10 am

Michael's academic interests include historiography and commemoration and he was one of the contributing essayists for Revising the Rising. After I gave Michael the run-down of my research project, the very first thing he did was to pull out a smattering of articles he has written on the subject and made me copies of the ones I chose. Michael was friendly and eccentric in the way many academics are: brilliant, easily excited when discussing their field of study, and very friendly.

One of the essays Laffan photocopied for me has not yet been published; to be released this Dec 12<sup>th</sup>, the essays are the written forms of the lectures Michael and others gave at the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration. Bertie Ahern will be at the book release, but I got a copy one of the essays early! Other writers Michael recommends include: Charles Townsend, James Stevens, Maureen Wall, and F. X. Martin.

I asked Michael why the government chose to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He replied: "low party purposes" He reasons that Bertie was afraid of Sinn Fein taking away his support so at the Fianna Fail convention Ahern announced there would be a 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration. Laffan admits his opinion is "cynical" but views the situation simply as a matter of "opportunism...could have done the 80<sup>th</sup> or 85<sup>th</sup>" [if the government wanted a calm spell from the north] and he reiterated that the 90<sup>th</sup> "reeked of low party politics." He added, Ireland has "enough shrines to military" endeavors...[and] ignores [the] constitutional tradition." When I asked what he predicts for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he scoffed and said, "gross...obsessive...far more flamboyant than the 50<sup>th</sup>," and anticipates heavy doses of "spin." He thinks that in some respects celebrating the Rising is antidemocratic.

I told Laffan what Conor Kostick told us on the walking tour – that the people who jeered the rebels were poor and relying on the British for poor relief and therefore resented the rebels disruption – Laffan reminded me that the rebels were also were marched through the southern suburbs to Dun Laoghaire harbor and those *rich* people jeered too. In one conciliatory remark, Michael explained that Dubliners were impressed that the rebels held on for 6-7 days at all. I then explained to Laffan my little "pop-quiz" with the boys and their sub-par performance of only naming two of the seven signatories. Michael explained that the government purposefully has singled out Pearse; in most history texts, more space given to Pearse than the whole rising put together.

Laffan commented that in 1919 Ireland democratically resigned the declaration of independence in the first Dail: why don't we [the Irish] celebrate that? Answering his own question, Michael rejoined, "Ireland glorifies violence." In regards to the actual event, Michael highlighted a few points: MacNeill's countermanding order ensured that the rebels couldn't win; "Pearse wanted to be shot;" the rebels understood that they had put on a good show and it was not the total fiasco that they thought it might have been; William Irvin Thompson said that the rising was as good as theater; Joyce didn't have much to say about the rising.



## APPENDIX G

Informal interview with Emily Mark Fitzgerald, lecturer of Cultural Policy and Arts Management, UCD in her office at University College Dublin in Belfield  
November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 10am

Aeven scheduled this interview for the week before my ISP but FitzGerald had to postpone our meeting. While the interview was supposed to be “practice,” FitzGerald was a great resource; she did not have much to offer about my research specifically but pointed me in the direction of those who did. Emily suggested I get in touch with Carole who is currently on a committee researching the 1966 commemoration and suggested I walk right next door to meet Pat Cooke, the man who ran Kilmainham Gaol in the 1980s and 90s.

Emily explained to me the research she just completed for her dissertation. Apparently since 1990, there have been 80+ monuments erected in memory of the famine. They range from graveyards to huge projects and for her research; FitzGerald visited all of them and showed me the pictures she took. She focused on how each monument is commemorated in a different way though found that small private groups creating a grassroots phenomenon commissioned most and therefore not funded by the public though for the public. Emily explained that to get money for public art in Ireland one can look to the local authorities as they have money to give, or try to tap into the Percent For Art Act, legislation that allocates a percentage of any government funding to be spent on art, visual and otherwise.

As I wrote a paper on the famine memorial sculpture on the Custom House Quay, Emily and I discussed that piece of art in detail. This sculpture is titled “Famine” which surprised me because I know many Irish people think the term “famine” ignores the fact that so much food was exported during those years. I asked Emily what motivation she attributed to the building of famine memorials and did she find that they were often pointing the finger at England. She replied, “Blame is not an issue with the monuments.” Apparently the sculpture was built without a site in mind but when Norma Smurfit got involved, artist Rowan Gillespie was allowed to install it anywhere he wished within the city. This surprised me because the sculpture looked like it was done with the location in mind. Emily gave me the basic run down of the Office for Public Works (OPW) and what their role is within the city.\* FitzGerald informed me that Fintan O’Toole wrote negatively about the famine memorial’s prohibitively expensive so-called “community” involvement; O’Toole’s criticism was that the cost to have your name on a memorial plaque was so high that ended up having the starving figures standing on top of the names of the rich.

Our conversation moved towards commemoration. In terms of commemoration, the famine and 1916 are reversed: whereas 1916 was commemorated from the start and *then* became a touchy subject, the famine was not always commemorated (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary passed without much fanfare) but is now all of a sudden being memorialized. In many ways, the appeal of 1916 is still fresh while the famine was a socially catastrophic event without any heroism.

\* I later was in touch with OPW to discuss the future plans for the GPO.

## APPENDIX H

Forum posting from Indymedia Ireland website, verbatim. Posted by Kevin Murphy on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Retrieved from <https://indymedia.ie/article/77853>, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

The National 1916 commemoration committee - reclaim the Proclamation!!  
The states photo opportunities are over for this year - who stands by the republic now?

As the hypocritical farce which was the 26 county states dishonest attempt to misrepresent and hijack the anniversary of the Easter Rising fades for another year the real work of reclaiming the republic for the people carries on in the background. The National 1916 commemoration Committee was founded in 2001 with the express purpose of commemorating and remembering the ideals, aims and sacrifice of the 1916 rising in a dignified and fitting manner as the 100th anniversary of this momentous event draws ever nearer. It is essential Irish people are made aware of the yawning gulf between the aims of 1916 and the reality of the corrupt, servile neo-colonial 26 county state, which stands in fundamental opposition to everything 1916 was about - the sovereign ownership of Ireland, its territory and resources, by the people of Ireland. With the ongoing foreign occupation of our northern territory, the theft of our national resources - gas, oil and the imminent privatisation of our water resources in the north, the use of Shannon to facilitate mass murder, kidnap and imperialist ventures throughout the globe it can be stated quite honestly that Ireland today remains a subjugated land, outside of the ownership of the Irish people. Irish sovereignty in all its forms has been cast aside by native capitalists in ignominious servitude to foreign masters and landlords. The National 1916 Commemoration Committee urges all Irish citizens to stand against these multiple usurpations of our sovereignty, to reject the states hypocritical ceremonies in future and stand with them in commemorating the ideals and aims of 1916. It is essential this debate is kept alive and as part of our attempts to do so we present this article examining the motivations and aims of the 1916 leaders.

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A selection of forum postings taken verbatim from Politics.ie website. The first comment posted on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.politics.ie/viewtopic.php?t=27645&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0&sid=11ac64b98be2f01d62a4d05d2922dc70>, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

Below are just a sampling of the posts on the topic of what will happen to the GPO. Clearly, there at least some Dubliners who care about the future of the building; that said, complaining about it on a web-forum really won't change anything.

- Another Government decision taken that would not meet with Public support and no doubt been done at the behest of business interests. I think we need a 'Save the GPO from the Developers' Campaign.
- Excellent idea if they did it well. I would be really disappointed if horrible shops like Carrolls or O'Briens goes in there. I would much prefer if became a cultural

and Irish political centre where the standard is high. Whats the point in the theatre being there, they should just move the Abbey down to where the Carlton is and start making the street a bit better.

- Sure 'tisnt consumerism the centre of our society nowadays? Is it not quite fitting?
- Maybe they should turn it into a prison for corrupt TDs and the people who pay them.
- This is a national disgrace. Can we stop selling out already?
- But even in its degraded state I would not hand it over to the Nesbitt family by choice- it deserves more considerate and appreciative owners; and the state is the best that comes to my mind, but I'm open to suggestions.
- If they really really have to put shops in the GPO can they at least model it on something with a bit of class e.g. Powerscourt, only not so southside (geographically and culturally). Respect for the building's history, exterior and interior; independent, Irish-owned boutiques, galleries, good food etc. And murals. I want epic 1916 revolutionary murals all over the walls. There must be some Belfast-based artists in need of a bit of that line of work.
- It should either stay a post office or become a museum, in fact even when its museum there still should be a small post office in it, and perhaps a section as post office museum.

## APPENDIX I

Informal interview with Jack McGlade, Oatlands College for Boys history teacher at Oatlands College, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 9:30am

I asked Jack how he approached the topic of the Rising when he taught history students. He says he emphasizes that the “rebels didn’t represent the will of the people of Ireland.” McGlade mused that if in 1916 the general public were polled as to whether they would rather have home rule or an independent republic, the majority would pick a republic but only if it was a feasible option. Jack reasons that had the rebels tried to achieve a republic through peaceful means more people would have supported them.

I asked Jack if he had gone to any of the commemorations and he said no, he had not despite his “very republican background:” his father was in the IRA and his mother was in Cumann na mBan. McGlade followed that leak of information with the disclaimer that he tries not to be biased despite his background. In comparing the way history has been taught to previous generations and today’s youth, McGlade thinks students today have a “more rounded understanding.” During Jack’s time at school, “the period of 1916-1918 tended to be skipped over a bit.” Today’s Leaving Certificate students get more of a detailed history of the Home Rule party. He explains the obvious fact: the further you’re removed from the historical event, the more objective you can be about it. That said, Jack still thinks history as a subject is taught better now.

Jack gave me a copy of the history Leaving Certificate version of The Guidelines for Teachers and lent me a copy of the history Leaving Certificate syllabus so that I may see for myself what is covered in the curriculum and what is omitted.

## APPENDIX J

Informal interview with Terry Fagan, current director of the North Inner City Folklore Project of Dublin, at the Kylemore Café on O'Connell Street.

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 12pm

Terry brought me a 1916 commemorative poster as a gift and I value it as one of my most meaningful souvenirs. We spent an hour or so discussing history over tea and after our conversation Terry took me on a brief walking tour of the Moore Street area to the places where key events took place, such as the signing of the proclamation.

Terry began the conversation with the explanation that he was raised on a “diet of republican history.” Terry jumped from one topic to another while we talked over tea but his sentiments remained fluid throughout the conversation. He told me that as long as there is a British presence in Ireland, the conflict is not settled. I am not sure what type of “presence” he means, but he said that the people in 1916 were yearning for Irish freedom and the Irish still do even today.

His great-grandfather was involved with the Rising and the civil war. This era is so crucial to understanding Ireland's history but Fagan claims the “free state disowned it's republican past” and ideals. Growing up, Fagan was involved with the dock laborers who supported the Citizen Army, or the “working-class army,” unlike the Irish Volunteers who were a “middle-class army.” Terry wears a Connolly badge on his lapel, evidence of his loyalties to the man and what he stood for. In discussing the Easter Rising, Terry insisted that I first examine the 1913 lockout that created the need for a Citizen Army. Another point that Terry wanted to make sure I understood was that the women of the Rising have only now begun to get their dues. He said the women were such integral parts of the Rising but for so long were overlooked and left out of the accounts, as men wrote the accounts. Terry advised me to “marry the two” stories, the one of the women and that of the men, because he thinks I am “getting roped into the men's story,” which he is probably right about, as I have been listening to and reading only male accounts.

A great anecdote, Terry told me how the British soldiers were “gentlemen” and this was one of their pitfalls; the women working for the Rising were able to cycle around the city delivering messages because the soldiers wouldn't search their bodies, they were gentlemen! Another anecdote Terry shared with me is as follows: a 14-year-old girl, Molly O'Reilly, worked for Connolly. Connolly appreciated her so much, he asked her if she wanted to hoist up the flag on top of the GPO to announce the new Republic! So it was a young 14-year-old girl one who raised the flag during the Rising, according to Fagan. Terry calls the women the “backbone” of the Rising and believes the rebellion would have “been nothing without them;” the women were also the first group to reject the treaty after the Rising; women brought in the guns at Howth. Fagan insisted I read about Grace Gifford (Plunkett) who he promises is a fascinating character. Terry was not happy to report that she ended up having to sell her husband's account of the Rising for a mere 100 pounds because the state refused to pay her a widow's pension and she needed the money so badly when living in the nursing home in her old age. He suggested the book, No Ordinary Women, by McCool.

I asked Terry whether he takes part in the commemoration ceremonies and he said that he usually joins the Connolly commemorations. He has been part of a group who laid wreaths at the GPO in honor of the women of the Rising. He also had celebrated the 1913 lockout by reenacting the event. When I asked Terry about the Irishmen fighting in the Great War who often go overlooked, he said that he thinks historians put too much emphasis on them and that really the men were just in dire need of jobs and so fighting in the war was a job, nothing more, and not to romanticize their involvement.

Terry suggested I look into William Martin Murphy's role in the Rising because he is a good link between the 1913 lockout and the 1916 Rising. Fagan also explained how the IRB was so successful because it was so secretive and kept their information away from British intelligence. Apparently Connolly was taken captive by the IRB days before the Rising because they heard he was going to start the rebellion with his own army and they said no, we must do it all together for it to succeed.

As Terry explained to me, years ago children were taught Irish history in school and nationalist songs though that tradition has died out. Once the civil rights movement started in the north, the Republic had to be more "discreet" about their nationalism. In 1916, Connolly knew there was only one way to bring about change and that was through the government and so while he was fighting the cause of the working class, he knew he had to have a change in government and so joined up with the IRB. The "proclamation is a meeting of two objectives with the same means," but if left strictly to Pearse, the "proclamation would have been a poem."

Terry also offered some of his personal history: he joined the young IRA group at age 12 and learned his Irish history from this group. Terry worked in the intelligence sector of the IRA and didn't know who else was part of the group nor did he attend meetings because they were so secretive. This wasn't the case in 1916; then, everyone wore uniforms and knew who was involved. In 2003, Fagan and his colleague's jobs were threatened so he and 5 others decided to go on hunger strike in front of the GPO. The strike lasted only 24 hours before Bertie Ahern himself came to tell him their jobs were secure after all.

Walking around, Terry was very knowledgeable about the Rising in its physical context, as in he knew where different events occurred. He also explained that the reason the plaques were so hard to see was because if left up to the shop owners, they wouldn't be there at all and so in some ways, they are a compromise. Terry lamented, "commerce supercedes history" and that "money is god" to some Irish today.

## APPENDIX K

Phone conversation with Gerard Bourke, representative of the Office of Public Works.  
November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 4pm

After reading the online forum from Politics.ie complaining of the government's plan to convert the GPO into a shopping mall, I searched online for some evidence to confirm this. I was unsuccessful but while I was on the Office Public Works (OPW) website, I thought I might as well email my question, though rarely have I found that those queries are answered. I received an email within a few days explaining that no one in the office could confirm or deny that claim but that they would try to find the answer for me. About a week later, I got a call from Gerard Bourke, a representative from OPW in a follow-up response. He said that yes, the GPO is supposed to be turned into a museum by 2016 – to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rising – but that it won't be a shopping center, although Arnott's has bought some of the stores on the block and will expand. Bourke says they "don't really know what to do with the space" and he is not sure what would be appropriate to put in the museum, especially since there are already two 1916 museums, one at Kilmainham and another at Collins Barracks, which Bourke says is supposed to double or triple in size before 2016. From the brief conversation we had, Bourke seemed daunted by the task of erecting yet another homage to the 1916 Rising and I interpreted his tone as exasperated with the government's perceived need to commemorate this one event in so many ways.